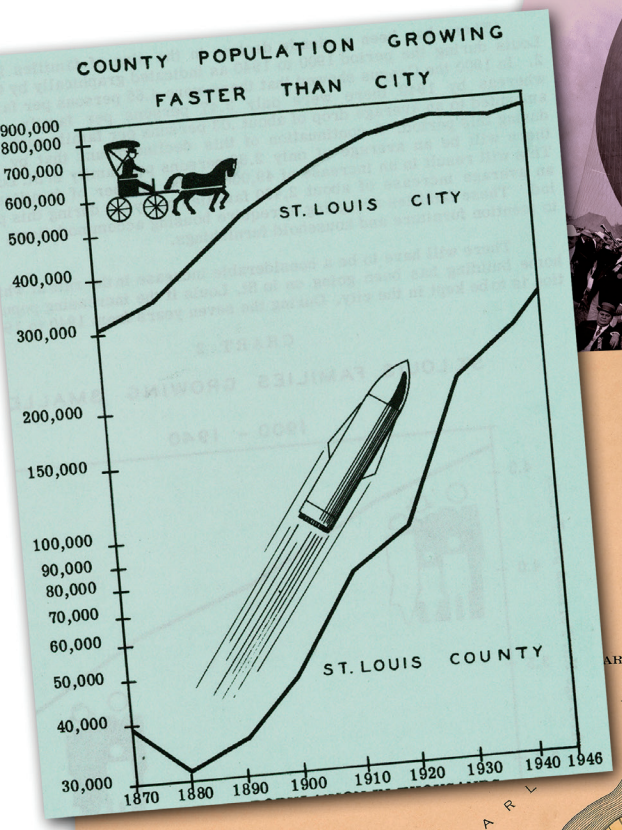
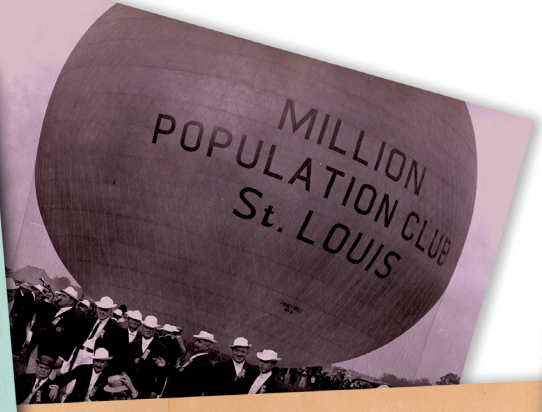
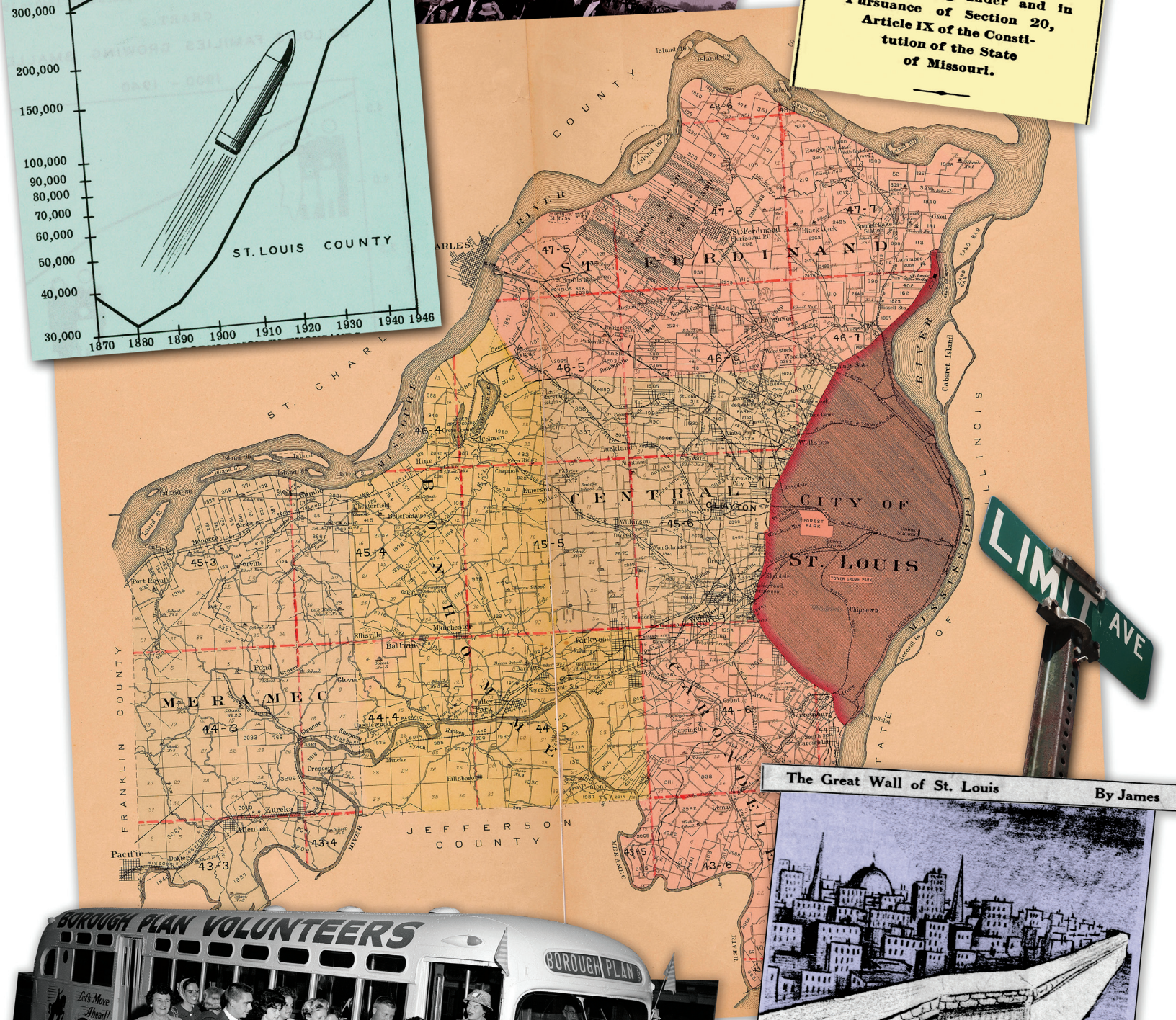



SCHEME FOR THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE
COUNTY and CITY of ST. LOUIS
AND
Charter for the City of St. Louis,
As Proposed by the Board of Free-Holders, Acting under and in Pursuance of Section 20, Article IX of the Constitution of the State of Missouri.


ST. CHARLES COUNTY
MISSOURI RIVER
ST. FERDINAND
CENTRAL
CITY OF ST. LOUIS
MERAMEC HIGHLANDS
JEFFERSON COUNTY
FRANKLIN COUNTY
MISSISSIPPI RIVER
ILLINOIS
Cahokia
Cahokia Creek
Cahokia Canal
Cahokia Diversion Channel
Cahokia Levee
Cahokia Drainage District
Cahokia Creek Drainage District
Cahokia Canal Drainage District
Cahokia Diversion Channel Drainage District
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Cahokia Canal Levee District
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Cahokia Creek Levee Drainage District
Cahokia Canal Levee Drainage District
Cahokia Diversion Channel Levee Drainage

# The Great Divorce

## St. Louis City and County's Dividing Line

Cities are shaped by all sorts of boundaries. Sometimes they are fixed natural features, like rivers, mountains, or lakes. Other times they are humanmade, such as political lines that are etched into place and can divide nearly as well as any wall of brick or stone. In 1876, St. Louis City and St. Louis County drew a line and split into two counties in what became known as the Great Divorce. Despite multiple reconciliation efforts, the Great Divorce has held strong for over 150 years, leaving the St. Louis region with a fragmented governmental structure unlike almost any other large US city.

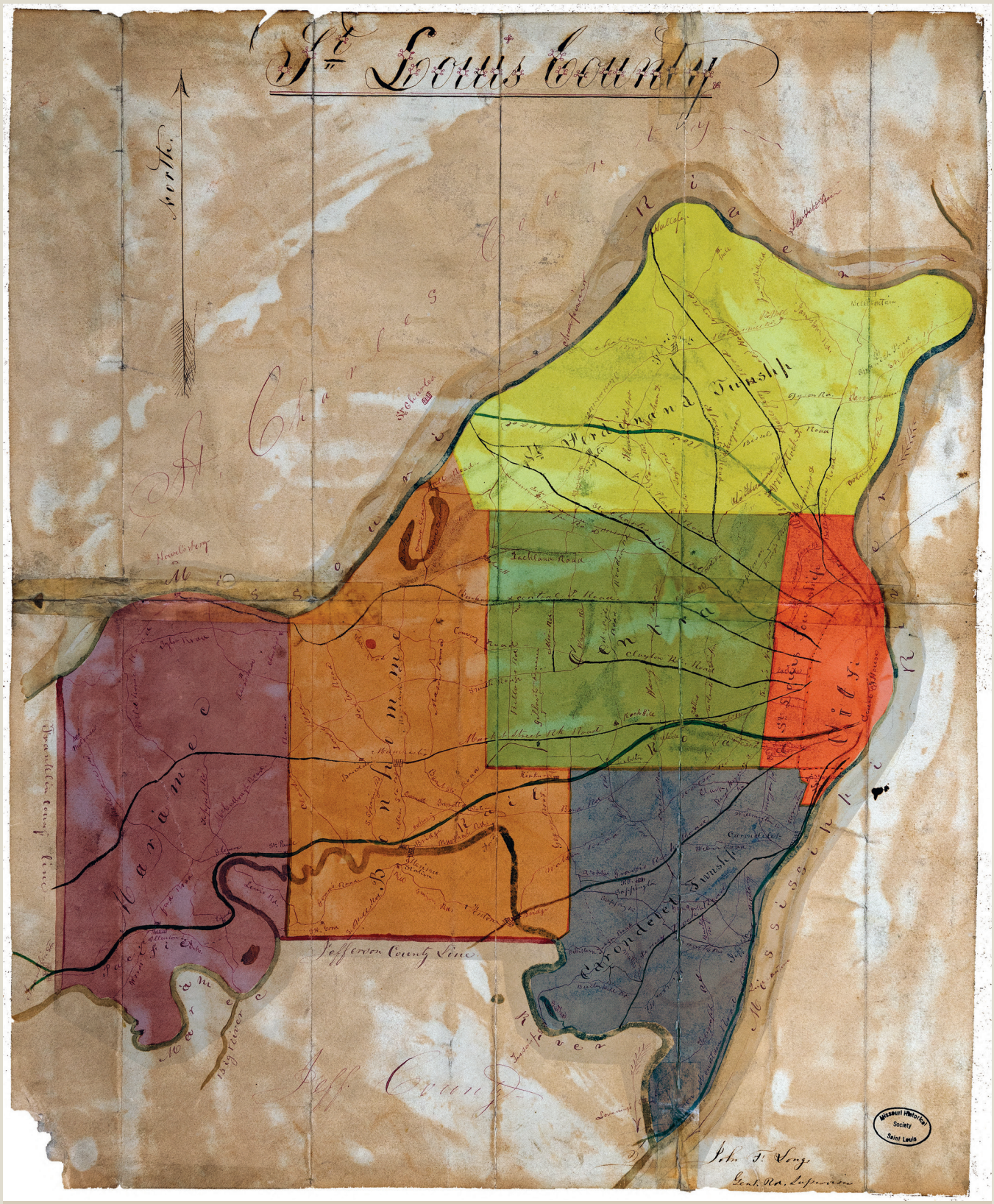
By *Andrew Wanko*

While the City/County split is a strange part of life for every person living in the St. Louis region, the question of why it exists at all usually elicits a shrug and a dismissive, "It's just always been that way." Exploring the origins of our city's Great Divorce means returning to the mid-19th century, when the 589-square-mile area that is now separated into St. Louis "City" and "County" was all one St. Louis County, and the land west of Grand Avenue was little more than rolling pastures.

Things looked great for St. Louis in 1870. The city had escaped the Civil War largely unscathed. Wall-to-wall steamboats once again crowded its levee, fueling a booming industrial metropolis. Civic boosters branded St. Louis the "Future Great City of the World," and there was widespread confidence that, as the 19th century continued its march toward the 20th, the city's skyrocketing population and prosperity would continue.

Compared to the sprawling, multi-county metropolitan regions that most Americans live in today, post–Civil War St. Louis was incredibly dense. Since 1855, St. Louis's city limits had stopped at Grand Avenue. More than 310,000 people—almost 20 percent of the state's population—lived east of that line. In the remaining 571 square miles of St. Louis County

*Maps, photos, and news clippings related to the Great Divorce.*
*Graphic by Andrew Wanko, 2026.*
*Please see page 1 for image credits.*




*In this 1860 map, the unified St. Louis County is divided into the six townships of St. Louis (red), Central (green), St. Ferdinand (yellow), Carondelet (blue), Bonhomme (orange), and Meramec (purple). Despite holding the vast majority of the county's population, St. Louis City only received two votes against the other townships' one each. Missouri Historical Society Collections.*

west of Grand, just 40,000 people were sprinkled throughout the rolling farmland and in a handful of small towns like Florissant, Carondelet, and Kirkwood.

The whole of St. Louis County was divided into six "townships," all overseen by a governing body called the St. Louis County Court. Even though St. Louis City's single township held more than 80 percent of the County's population, the court's voting structure dictated that St. Louis City would have two votes, while the five rural townships each got one. This was where the problems began. Rural interests held an outsize hand in decision-making: By banding together five against two, they could easily pass tax levies and spending proposals that siphoned vast revenue away from St. Louisans. They could also alter or veto St. Louis's plans while the handcuffed City could only watch helplessly.

The situation rapidly deteriorated in 1867, when the Missouri legislature gave the St. Louis County Court the overarching power to assign, collect, and redistribute all the City's taxes. As the already cramped City struggled to build and maintain the urban infrastructure that thousands relied upon, its money could now be ripped away to pave farmers' roads and build countryside bridges. "A foreign body," Mayor James Thomas bellowed, was holding St. Louisans' money "as though we were infants."

Enraged St. Louisans increasingly saw themselves as St. Louisans by choice, St. Louis Countians by unfortunate association. Although City politicians initially made measured calls for legislative reform, their tone quickly soured. By the early 1870s, a St. Louis "pro-separatist" faction had crystallized. It demanded a divorce from the rest of St. Louis County, "that which costs an immense amount of money and contributes nothing to the welfare and prosperity of the city," in the words of St. Louis postmaster David Armstrong.

St. Louis's separatists knew that any rogue declaration of independence was guaranteed to drown in a quagmire of legal disputes, but they were about to catch a perfectly timed break. Missouri had written a new state constitution in the tension-filled wake of the Civil War, but now that things had calmed, many politicians were unhappy with some of its more severe restrictions and limitations. In the summer of 1875, delegates from all over the state assembled in Jefferson City to draft a new Missouri Constitution, and St. Louis delegates seized their chance to write a divorce from St. Louis County directly into the document.

They drafted articles proposing a novel idea in American politics: "Home rule" would grant cities the power to extend their own city limits and adopt their own structures of government without asking for a charter from the state itself. They limited it to cities of more than 100,000 people—and at that time, St. Louis was the state's only one. Ratified by Missouri voters on October 30, 1875, the new Missouri Constitution's article 9, section 16 ("large cities may frame their own charters") and section 20 ("City of St. Louis, extension of limits, adoption of charter") stamped into the state's highest document the legal framework for St. Louis to declare its independence. Barely six weeks later, St. Louis mayor Henry Overstolz announced to the St. Louis County Court that 13 "freeholders"—wealthy property owners—who would hash out the new dividing line between St. Louis City and County should be selected, so that by the next summer, the Great Divorce would be ready to go up for a public vote.

On April 8, 1876, those 13 elite, socially connected white men assembled for the first of many sessions to craft the Great Divorce. They included:

- James O. Broadhead (City; lawyer, later the American Bar Association's first president)
- George H. Shields (City; lawyer, helped write Missouri's 1875 Constitution)
- Albert Todd (City; retired property lawyer, helped write Missouri's 1875 Constitution)
- Dwight Collier (City; lawyer, St. Louis City Council member)
- Silas Bent (City; retired naval officer, son of a Missouri Supreme Court judge)
- Frank Lutkewitte (City; politician)
- George Ward Parker (City; founder of the Parker-Russell Mining Company)
- Michael Phelan (City; Missouri representative)
- Samuel Reber (City; Missouri Circuit Court judge, St. Louis City counselor)
- David H. Armstrong (City; former St. Louis postmaster, Missouri senator)

• August Krieckhaus (City; Washington Mutual Fire Insurance Company president)

• Henry T. Mudd (County; Kirkwood real estate speculator)

• George Penn (County; wealthy Florissant landowner)

These freeholders met 52 times over the next two months—taking suggestions from citizens, pushing lines around maps, studying the charters of other large cities—but mostly, they argued. They sometimes spent entire sessions bickering over tiny adjustments that would later be thrown out. At one early session in April 1876, a freeholder insisted that the whole group needed to walk the proposed new boundary line for a "personal inspection of territory," to which another insisted that mucking across "melon patches" was "as ridiculous as it was expensive." Some of the freeholders thought long term, warning that the burgeoning City should take a huge swath of land now because there wouldn't be another opportunity to do so. Others looked at things as they were at present, arguing that the City should think small and leave behind the burden of maintaining "diverse and sundry cornfields."

Finally, on July 3, 1876, the freeholders submitted their "scheme of separation." Its footprint is instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with the map of St. Louis City. The line tracked along River des Peres (a backbone of the City's drainage system); ringed the City's new, large public parks (Carondelet Park, Forest Park, and O'Fallon Park); and traveled up past Bellefontaine and Calvary cemeteries, with a narrow extension north to the Chain of Rocks, where the City had long planned to build a new waterworks (it was eventually completed in 1894). St. Louis City would more than triple in area to over 61 square miles—most of it empty land that, in 1876, seemed as though it would take centuries to fill.

On August 22, 1876, St. Louis County residents headed to the polls to vote on whether to dissolve St. Louis County as they knew it. When the election results came in, separatists were shocked to find that 52 percent had voted against the split. In classic machine-politics fashion, the powerful who had much to gain from the separation immediately demanded a recount. They turned to an ally: the "impartial" Judge Louis Gottschalk. The year before, he'd been among the delegates who helped rewrite the Missouri Constitution so that it allowed separation. Gottschalk appointed an investigative committee, whose members quickly reported they'd uncovered widespread "voter fraud." They tossed out 7,500 votes—about one-sixth of the total cast, and more than 80 percent of them against separation—and declared that separation had actually passed by an ample margin.

*The City/County dividing line runs down the center of Maplewood's two-block-long Limit Avenue and bisects the house at the end of the street—as it does in hundreds of other homes across the region. Photograph by Andrew Wanko, 2025.*

In a decision that St. Louisans likely never actually voted for, the City of St. Louis was now cleared to go it alone as an independent county. In less than two years, the Great Divorce had gone from a pipe dream to a constitutionally protected reality. In April 1877, the St. Louis County Court was ordered to vacate its City offices.

## The Long Cold Shoulder

The separatists had barely finished celebrating their "victory" when cracks in the Great Divorce began to show. In 1893 a US Supreme Court case over whether

GREAT AUCTION SALE OF 300 LOTS OF
THE ST. LOUIS COUNTY PROPERTY!
At CLAYTON, the New County Seat, Thursday, June 6th, 1878.
AT TEN O'CLOCK, A. M., ON THE PREMISES.
TITLE PERFECT. Warranty Deeds given by the County.
TERMS OF SALE.
LUNCH ON THE GROUNDS.
FARRAR & CO.,
W. W. HENDERSON,
PHILIP S. LANHAM,
Auctioneer.
Map showing Clayton and Vicinity
CENTRAL AVENUE
COURT HOUSE
HANLEY ROAD

*Auction of land at Clayton, 1878. After the Great Divorce, St. Louis County was left without a center of government. In December 1877, the purpose-built town of Clayton was created as the new county seat. Missouri Historical Society Collections.*

St. Louis City could charge special fees on telegraph poles that connected beyond city limits branded the City *imperium in imperio*, "an empire within an empire." But telegraph poles would soon be the least of the mini-empire's problems. The decades to come would prove that the wedge splitting the City and County had been hastily driven.

Because the Great Divorce is written into the Missouri Constitution, its undoing is not so simple. There are only two ways the City and County could reunite. The first: a constitutional amendment, initiated by a Missouri General Assembly member or by any Missourian who collects the required number of signatures (the exact number shifts—in 2026, it's 170,215) to get it onto a statewide ballot. It would pass with a simple majority. Some see the statewide vote as a tool to get around St. Louis's parochial infighting; others see it as involving people who have no business telling St. Louis how to operate.

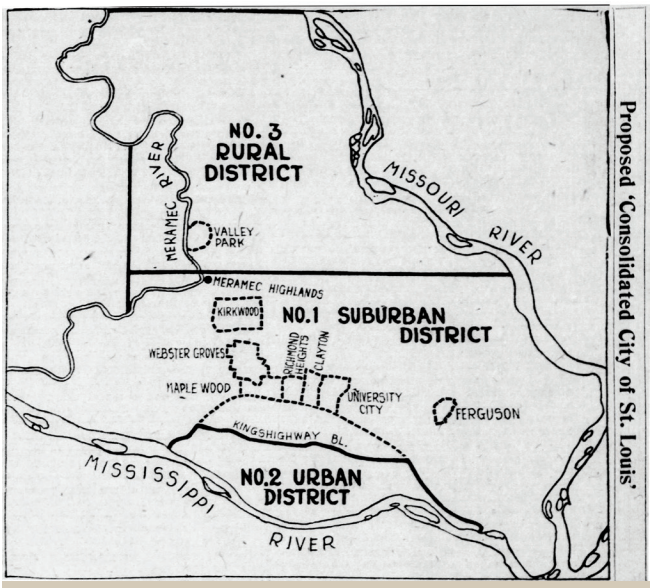
The second, added to the Missouri Constitution in 1924: assembling a group of 19 "freeholders" (after 1987, they'd be known as "electors")—nine from the City, nine from the County, and one appointed by the Missouri governor—to craft a plan that St. Louis City and County alone would vote to adopt or reject. The electors could suggest rearranging the City and County relationship in countless ways or suggest doing nothing at all. This process has been used successfully only once: In 1954, it created the City- and County-spanning Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District.

Of the eight serious attempts at reunification so far, three were by constitutional amendment (1930, 1962, and 2019) and five were by board of freeholders (1926, 1959, 1987, 1990, and again in 2019). Each attempt's conditions changed based on which side believed it had the upper hand, but the outcome has always been the same: The City and County decided they're better off going their separate ways.

## Early Reunification Attempts

The City's rapid growth throughout the late 19th century was surprising, even to the City itself. The land it gained in 1876 was more than half filled by the 1904 World's Fair. It'd be completely filled within 50 years. City leaders watched futilely as the world-altering technology of automobiles carried families to new developments throughout St. Louis County's former vast emptiness. While boosters like St. Louis's Million Population Club pumped the City's ego, St. Louis judge Samuel Rosenfeld understood the looming reality by 1922, when he wrote that St. Louis "was the only city of any size in the US that had not extended its boundaries in the last 50 years." The City's boundaries and its overlaid County boundaries were one and the same, and they were immovable.

In October 1925, St. Louis City and County named their board of freeholders who would make the first serious reunification effort in the region's history. Their fresh proposal would consolidate the City and County into three enormous districts: the Urban District (from the riverfront to Kingshighway), the Suburban District (from Kingshighway to past Kirkwood), and the Rural District (present-day west St. Louis County). As the plan was simmering, the nine freeholders from the (then much larger) City went in for a hostile takeover. They introduced plans to wipe out most of the County's governance—including its education system and police department—and turn those functions and all County properties over to the complete control of the City. The outraged County freeholders tried to have the proceeding thrown out entirely, when the City freeholders played their hand: They had secretly recruited County freeholder Julius Trampe, who gave them the needed majority to put the plan to voters. While a whopping 87 percent of City voters approved the "City takes all" plan at the October 1926 election, County voters responded with a justified wave of disapproval, and the first bid for reunification died at the polls.




*Among the St. Louis City freeholders who proposed this first attempt at reunification was attorney Henry Caulfield, who would serve as Missouri's governor from 1929 to 1933.* St. Louis Post-Dispatch, *October 6, 1925.*

Animosities cooled, and by 1930, recombination talks had resumed with a joint plan to avoid the local sabotage of 1926. The City and County chambers of commerce brought in Thomas Reed, chair of political science at the University of Michigan, to write up a detailed "outsider's" recombination proposal designed as an amendment to the Missouri Constitution. In Reed's proposal, the "City of Greater St. Louis" would retain all existing municipal boundaries, but control of any regionwide functions, such as roads, parks, and utilities (but crucially, not schools), would become the responsibility of an overarching metropolitan government. The campaign's optimistic slogan announced, "Make It a Greater St. Louis in a Greater Missouri," but 63 percent of Missourians voted "no" on November 4, 1930.

## Mid-1900s Reunification Attempts

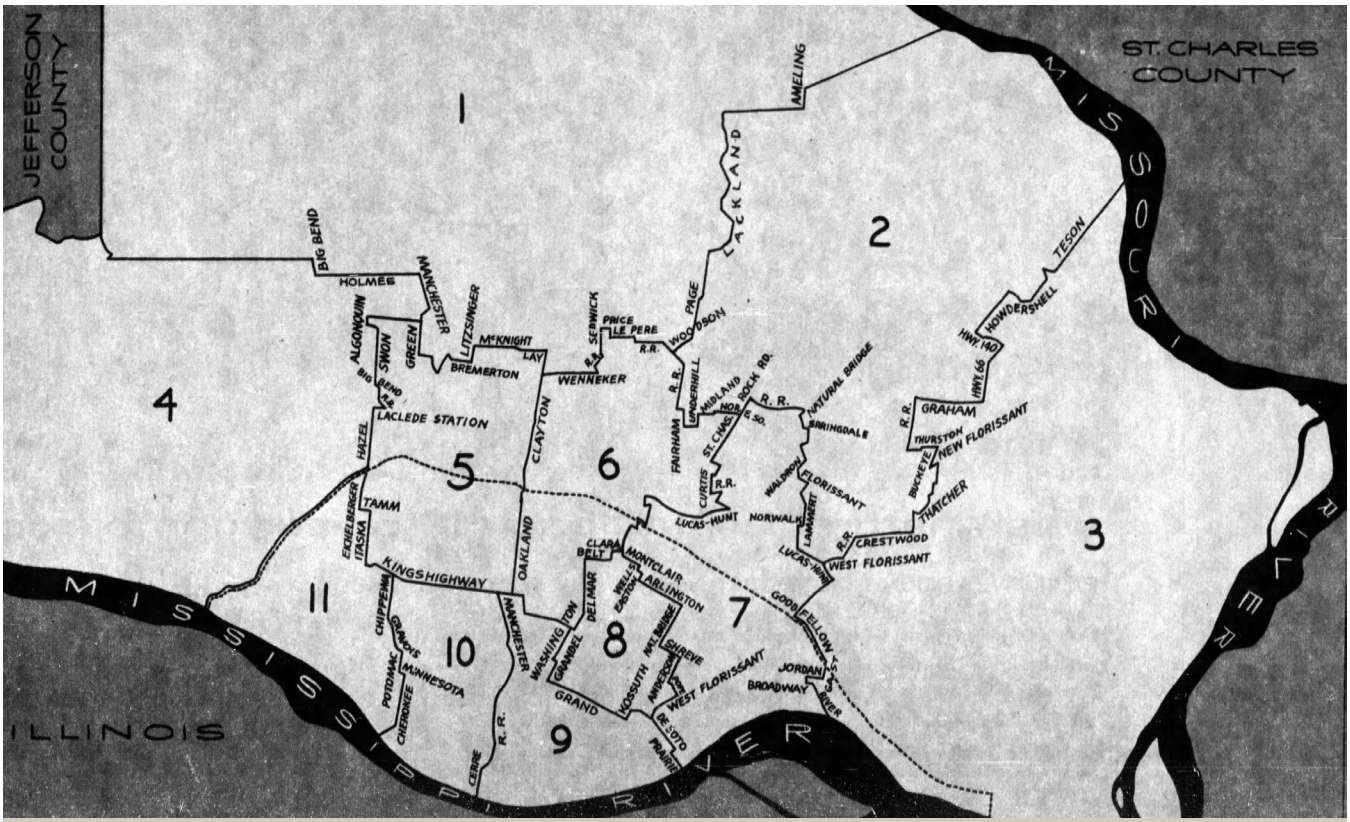
As these early attempts fizzled, the 1940 Census foreshadowed St. Louis City's impending crisis. From 1920 to 1940, the City's population growth had stalled, while St. Louis County's had nearly tripled, from 100,737 to 274,230. Across the next two decades of the suburban boom (1940–1960), the County's population would more than double itself again to just over 700,000. In that same stretch, St. Louis City would register its peak population in 1950 (856,796) before beginning a freefall that has continued ever since.

But St. Louis County was developing its own unique Gordian knot within the Great Divorce saga. These new suburban residents were using Missouri's "home rule" precedent to enact their own mini-divorces, carving the County into a patchwork of tiny self-governing municipal enclaves. Between 1930 and 1950, St. Louis County averaged nearly three new municipal incorporations every year; by 1960, there were more than 80 of them, ranging from Florissant's 40,000 residents to Champ's 50 residents. (And that was at Champ's height; today, only about 10 people live there.) Many of these incorporations were meant to safeguard against perceived threats, whether by localizing control of wealth or boxing out nearby communities whose residents were of different classes or races. Sometimes that segregation was explicitly stated. In 1937 white residents adjacent to the all-Black

town of Kinloch formed the new municipality of Berkeley specifically to establish a separate, all-white school system.

Now that the shrinking City and roaring County had switched roles in the power structure, new recombination proposals were percolating. In 1958 members of the Citizens Committee for City-County Cooperation announced that they had collected enough petition signatures to once again open a board of freeholders to propose a possible City-County consolidation. Unlike the board's sequestered meetings of 1926, many of these meetings were televised on KETC (Channel 9) in a sort of civics lesson for St. Louisans. The board's proposed District Plan would have kept the City-County line where it was, but there would have been an overarching metropolitan government on top of the two counties, dividing them into 11 large districts: 4 entirely in the City, 4 in the County, and 3 straddling the border. Each one would have similar populations, and to maintain balance, every 10 years the districts would be redrawn based on census data. Like 1930's Greater St. Louis proposal, the District Plan's metro government would have overseen all "core" regional functions. And like the 1930 proposal, voters crushed the District Plan in 1959 by a two-to-one margin in the City and a three-to-one margin in the County.

While recombination was at the front of the public's mind, 5 of the 19 freeholders who had created the District Plan scrambled to put together a radically different proposal and take it to a statewide vote for a constitutional amendment in 1962. Their Borough Plan called for a complete erasure of the St. Louis City and County governmental structures and border lines, including existing fire districts, sewer and water districts, judicial courts, and more. Replacing them would be a system of 22 New York City–style boroughs with populations ranging from 46,000 to nearly 100,000 people. Despite their population differences, each borough would elect two representatives to an




*The District Plan of 1959 had support from many powerful organizations, including the City and County chambers of commerce, the League of Women Voters, all the City's major news outlets, and the archdiocese's* St. Louis Review *newspaper—but voters struck it down.* St. Louis Post-Dispatch, *October 4, 1959.*

overarching legislative council, and those representatives would choose a mayor. Many outstate voters saw this "super city" as a power threat. At that time, St. Louis City and County contained more than a third of the state's population. More locally, Black political leaders rallied against the Borough Plan, arguing that Black St. Louisans' representation would be diminished. In November 1962 more than 74 percent of statewide voters chose "no," the worst defeat yet for reunification. (Coincidentally, the 1964 US Supreme Court ruling *Wesberry v. Sanders*, which enshrined the concept of "one person, one vote" in local legislative districts, would have made the Borough Plan's wildly different populations per two-legislator district illegal if it had passed.)

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND
ST. LOUIS COUNTY
CITY OF ST. LOUIS
TO 98 INCORPORATED TOWNS
STOP
POLICE
POLICE
Who are the opponents of Amendment 4 to Reunite St. Louis? The answer is simple . . . mostly VESTED INTERESTS AND POLITICIANS! Small wonder they're against it. Amendment 4 will sweep out hundreds of unneeded political jobs . . . remove the political road-blocks that impede community progress and strangle economic growth . . . do away with 97 separated and wasteful governments. Don't be misled! Reunification of St. Louis is the only solution to area-wide problems—the only way to create efficient, enlightened government, responsive to all the people! Vote FOR Amendment 4 to Reunite St. Louis next Tuesday.
MISSOURI COMMITTEE TO REUNITE ST. LOUIS
20½ NORTH BRENTWOOD BLVD.
ST. LOUIS 5

*This 1962 cartoon by the Missouri Committee to Reunite St. Louis depicts St. Louis City trapped behind the artificial bastions of its own making, while St. Louis County's "tiny kings" battle one another over small wins and toy houses.* St. Louis Globe-Democrat, *November 3, 1962.*

In 1962 the City and County were most alike—in their populations, negotiating power, and economic diversity—but neither side saw it that way. Despite the spreading cracks of its coming urban crisis, St. Louis City still positioned itself as the power broker, while St. Louis County rode its tidal wave of prosperity, not yet considering what might happen when that wave ran out. Both held strong that although there was no *I* in *team*, there certainly was in *win*.

## Late 1900s (and Beyond) Reunification Attempts

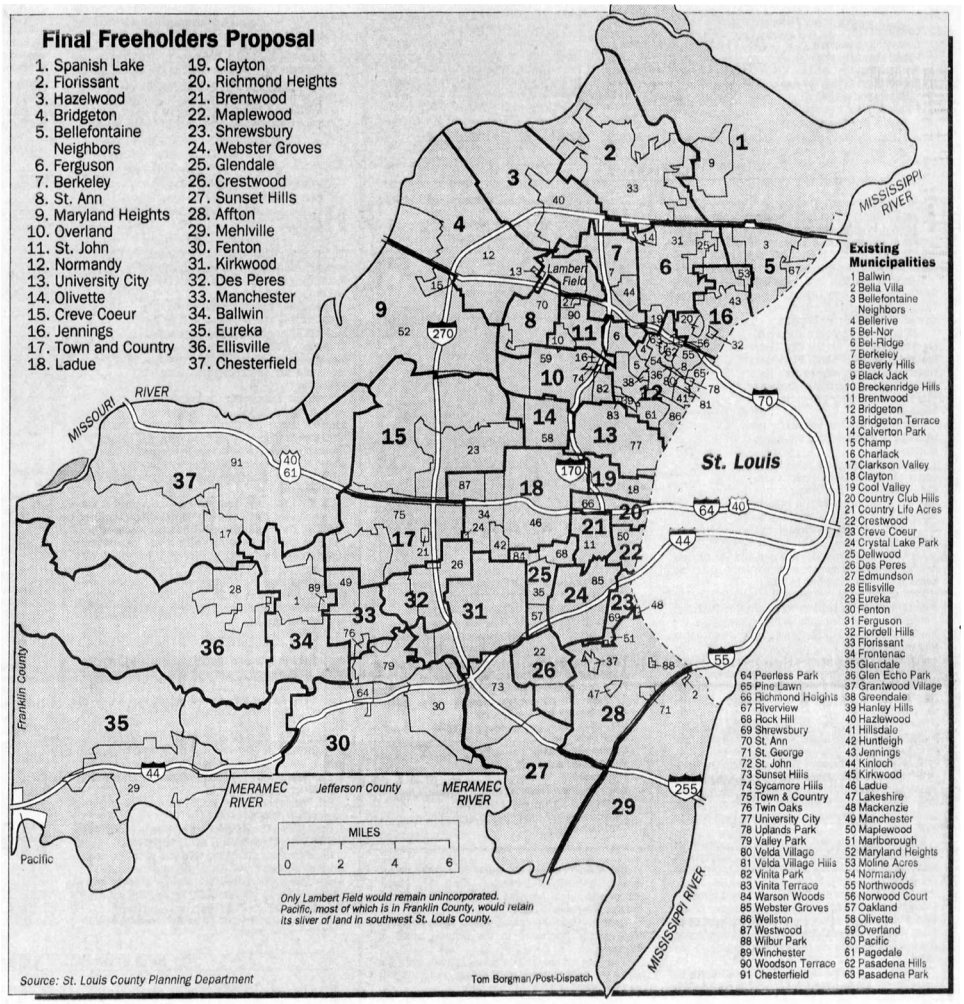
As the halfway mark of the 20th century ticked past, the Great Divorce dramatically amplified the urban distress that was befalling city centers across the United States. Walled-in St. Louis City lost 400,000 residents in 30 years—more than half its population. A 1973 study by the Rand Corporation found that without major local policy changes to St. Louis's governance, continued decline was inevitable, and it bleakly suggested that the City start to envision itself as a "large suburban center." In 1981, the same year St. Louis stood in for postapocalyptic Manhattan in the sci-fi blockbuster *Escape from New York*, a *Chicago Tribune* story hammered the nail in even deeper: "St. Louis—this is the city where more people HAVE left than ARE left."

While the City struggled, the County's population continued to soar, from just over 400,000 in 1950 to more than 973,000 by 1980. Where the suburbs once hugged the edge of St. Louis's urbanized area, new exurbs appeared in the far west—massive, centerless smatterings of cul-de-sacs and office parks completely removed from their host city and its land-use patterns. New "cities" such as Town & Country (1974), Maryland Heights (1985), and Chesterfield (1988) sprawled formlessly across the expanse. At 67 square miles, the low-density exurb of Wildwood (1995) is geographically larger than St. Louis City.

Enough signatures were gathered in 1987 to attempt a new change to local government. Although

the announcement set off the typical flurry of debate, the result wasn't actually a "reunification" proposal. A new board of freeholders proposed the 37 City Plan: While St. Louis City would remain a functionally separate county, St. Louis County's labyrinth of 91 municipalities and large swaths of unincorporated land would all be dissolved and redivided into 37 equivalent cities. Proponents claimed this redrawing would break up the wealthy municipalities that used their borders to exclude the poor, ensure that services across the County would be more evenly distributed, and erase the micro-municipalities that relied on traffic tickets to keep themselves alive. But the proposal never made it to voters. A court case challenged the constitutionality of the word "freeholder" (meaning "property owner") in its legislative language, and the 37 City Plan was thrown out. "Freeholders" would now be known as "electors," and a new board was assembled in the case's wake. Their 1990 proposal took nothing from the 37 City Plan; it only sought to create a City/County regional economic development commission and put Forest Park under joint City/County ownership. It was defeated in 1992.

Reunification talks went quiet until 2013. That year, the Better Together Coalition launched a study to calculate the economic costs of the City/County divide. When its results were released in 2016, it showed the combined St. Louis region had 115 local governments, 91 municipalities, 81 municipal courts, 60 police departments, 43 fire protection districts, 684 elected officials, enough combined ordinances and laws to fill 52,000 pages, and more than $750 million in government redundancy and inefficiency. In early 2019, Better Together announced that it was seeking to get a reunification plan on the 2020 statewide ballot. St. Louis City would re-enter the County as its largest municipality, while municipal governance powers—such as policing, land development, court systems, and sales tax collection—would all be turned over to a 33-person metro council overseen by one metro mayor. The announcement unleashed a media frenzy. While North City's politicians claimed Better Together would strip Black voters of their political power, Chesterfield's city council threatened to secede from St. Louis County altogether if the plan were passed. As a Hail



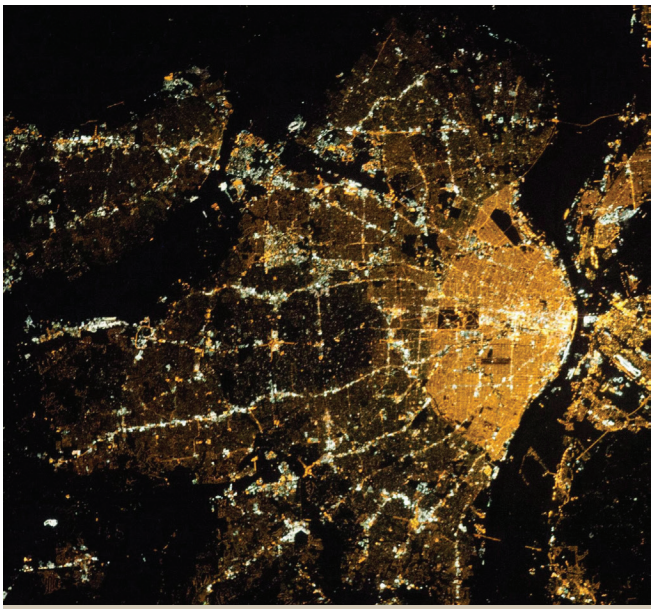

*The 37 City Plan of 1987 would have reorganized all of St. Louis County into 37 new "cities." District 12, for instance, would have contained some or all of at least 19 former municipalities.* St. Louis Post-Dispatch, *October 10, 1988.*

Mary rebuttal to Better Together's constitutional amendment plan, the Municipal League of Metro St. Louis collected thousands of voter signatures to open the board of electors process and try to get a competing reunification plan onto the same ballot in 2020. But just months after the grand announcement that St. Louis might vote on uniting the City and County for the first time since 1962, Better Together collapsed almost overnight.

In April 2019, St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger—who would have become the first metro mayor of a recombined St. Louis—was indicted on federal bribery charges and quickly resigned. Where Better Together once faced a barrage of political opposition, it now also had to contend with the fallout from a criminal scandal. Within two weeks, Better Together withdrew its seemingly doomed proposal. The competing board of electors process floundered as well. The County appointed its nine members, but the City's board of aldermen descended into months of infighting and still hadn't seated their electors by the time the COVID-19 pandemic shut down government functions in March 2020. The boat of negotiation had sunk before it had even left the shore.

## The Great Divorce Turns 150

For now, the Great Divorce remains a reality of St. Louis life. Some see the region's hyper-fragmentation as a net positive, claiming it offers lots of living choices and maximizes residents' local control. Others see chaotic wastefulness, collapse of civic responsibility, and blatant racism and classism. St. Louis County's tribalistic fiefdoms often pit governments against one another, rather than working toward any sort of win-win solutions or greater regional good. While some municipalities enjoy public pools, free leaf pick-up, and cutting-edge schools, others can barely afford to equip their firefighters. Affluent municipalities can leverage their separation to become even wealthier. Webster Groves, Des Peres, and Sunset Hills, for example, use municipal sales tax to avoid dramatically increasing home property taxes to meet their debt obligations. Meanwhile, poorer municipalities only get poorer, resorting to becoming "speed traps" that turn their police departments into sources of revenue. Outrage



*While the dividing line often goes unnoticed at street level, it shows up in surprising places—like from space at night. This image clearly shows the contrasting distance between streetlight placements in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. NASA Images, December 7, 2013.*

ensued in 2014 after a leaked mayor's memo from the north St. Louis County municipality of Edmundson showed that its police officers were encouraged to write more tickets to pay their own salaries.

Today, culture-rich St. Louis City continues its long struggle with disinvestment, a scourge made exponentially worse by the City/County divide. Because it exists simultaneously as a municipality and as a county, the City's byzantine hybrid government involves both municipal-level powers (e.g., police, fire, schools) and county-level powers (e.g., property assessment, license collection, circuit attorney, sheriff, court). The City's tiny footprint also feeds damaging and inaccurate national narratives that pull statistics only from St. Louis City proper—which contains just 10 percent of the region's population—and then intentionally (or unintentionally) applies them to the entire region. This phenomenon rears its ugly head every year when "most dangerous cities" lists are released, and St. Louis is all but guaranteed a place near the top.

The bigger picture—which can be overlooked amid so much infighting—is that small victories are frequently won at the expense of much larger ones, vic-

tories that could go much further if they were spread across a wider geographic area. The St. Louis region is brimming with world-class resources, but it often struggles to compete—much less thrive—because of fragmentation that has left those resources unable or unwilling to be pooled. The real challenger is not the municipality next door; it's Kansas City, Indianapolis, Nashville, Columbus—any number of rising, midsize cities that are finding ways to attract and retain new residents and businesses. In the last century, Nashville and Indianapolis have both consolidated their central cities and wider metropolitan governments.

For the two divorcees to ever get back together, they have to approach each other as equals, rather than as one that's marrying down. In 1876 the City viewed itself as the one that married down, the wealthier partner having to prop up the opportunistic other. But the tables turned in the late 20th century, and the County saw itself as settling if it were to reunite with the City. Could the situations reverse themselves once again? The City continues to gain investment, particularly in its central corridor, and per capita income is on the rise. The once young and prosperous County's latest census figures show its population growth has stagnated, and in 2010, its per capita income registered its first drop. The County is also facing the daunting reality of maintaining a giant, low-density, increasingly expensive infrastructure system. If the St. Louis City leaders of 1876 could have looked 50 years into the future and seen the revolutionary urban changes on the horizon, divorce might not have seemed like such a great idea. If today's St. Louis County leaders could see 50 years from now, would they arrive at the same conclusion?

The Great Divorce's deepest division will almost certainly endure longer than the actual dividing line, if it's ever erased at all. "City" and "County" are St. Louis idiosyncrasies, stereotypes that have been ingrained into the region's collective us-versus-them mentality. In any other city, these terms aren't so loaded. But in St. Louis's tiny cold war, they straddle an invisible Berlin Wall, one that St. Louisans on both sides can point across and declare:

"I'm not that."

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